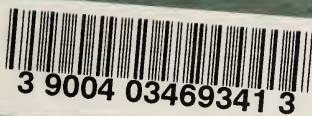


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THE LAND SHALL NOT BE SOLD FOREVER "

LEVITICUS XXV. 23.

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WAS this injunction the declaration of some eternal principle, resting on a basis of justice, obligatory on all ages and conditions of society, or was it only a temporary expedient, applicable merely to a certain peculiar condition of the Jewish people?

The question resolves itself into this: Can land be justly treated as an article of commerce, to be bought and sold, just as food, clothing, shelter, or any other product of labor, or does land differ from other things, so that justice forbids its sale?

Between the land, the gift of the Creator, and commodities, the product of the laborer, the Mosaic economy made the widest distinction. No restriction whatever was placed on the sale of the products of industry, but the sale of land was strictly forbidden. No one could do more with the land than to give a lease till the Jubilee year.

This method has been spoken of as an entail, resembling the entail common in Britain. But these two entails differed as widely as two things could differ. The Jewish entail secured land to everyone, the British entail secures it to particular heirs only, and excludes all others. The one entail ensured equality, the other perpetuates and intensifies inequality.

To determine the rightness or wrongness of selling land, we must examine what selling means. How does anyone acquire a right to sell? Evidently a man can sell only what is his, and nothing more than is his. That which he owns absolutely, evidently he can sell absolutely, and that which he owns only limitedly, he can sell only limitedly.

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When one man catches fish and another catches game, and they exchange their product, this constitutes buying and selling. The one sells fish and buys game, the other sells game and buys fish. We call this selling fish or selling game; in reality it is exchanging services. Each renders a service; each confers a benefit; each is enriched only on condition that he enriches.

After a man has toiled to catch fish or game, to raise a crop or build a house, on what condition can I justly demand any of these commodities from him? Should I attempt to take them without offering some equivalent product or service, would he not immediately and intuitively recognize that I was subjecting him to an injustice, and would he not feel that he was quite justified in resisting my efforts? Undoubtedly he would. It requires no demonstration to prove to a man that he is defrauded when he is compelled to render or surrender service without receiving an equivalent service in return.

Are we not quite safe in assuming this as one of the basal principles of ethics, that honesty demands that services should be reciprocal—service for service, product for product, benefit for benefit? Suppose we deny this doctrine, and assert that one part of humanity has the right to claim service without rendering service, do we not at once proclaim the doctrine of slavery, fraud and theft?

When a man toils, raises a crop, provides a house, cures a disease, elucidates a philosophy, invents a machine, organizes an industry, or charms our souls with the beauties of song or oratory, then he establishes a right to charge his fellowman, a right to sell. The right to make a charge rests on a service rendered or a product furnished. Can anyone, on any other condition, justly claim the right to demand product or service from his fellowman? Unquestionably he can not.

Can any man, any combination of men, any government, furnish land? Is land a product of industry? Do land speculators carry on factories for the production of town lots? Did the landlords of Ireland furnish that island to their tenants? These questions at once call the attention to the essential distinction between land, which no man furnishes, and the products of labor, which men do furnish.

WHO ARE THE OWNERS OF THE EARTH?

It cannot be the exclusive possession of one generation, or of any one portion of any generation. "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth," and "the earth hath He given to the children of men." The only doctrine as to the ownership of the earth consistent with the teachings of Christianity, with the teaching that all are equally the children of God, is that the earth was made equally for all. The denial of this doctrine at once smites at the foundation of the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Proclaim to any body of men that God created this earth to be the exclusive possession of one portion of humanity, and that the rest are here on sufferance only, tenants at will of the "owners" of the earth, that these "owners" have the right, the unquestionable moral right, to exclude the "non-owners" from the gift of the Creator, and we at once proclaim a doctrine diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christianity, and which reduces the expression, "Our Father," to a meaningless platitude.

If the land belongs just as much to the child as to the parent, then the latter certainly can have no moral right to sell that which belongs to another. For one generation to sell out the right of the next generation, is evidently in morals what, in law, would be deemed *ultra vires*. One generation is not the "owner" of the earth; it belongs to all generations—to the last generation just as much as to the first, to every one of every generation as much as it belongs to any one of any generation.

THE TWO USES OF LAND.

The farmer uses the land as an agent of production. He is a laborer, a producer. In the growing abundance of his product he rejoices, and is always seeking, by every expedient, to render his production more abundant. Only after he has produced, does he claim the right to clothing, hardware, and other products. His selling is the exchange of product for product, or service for service. He offers abundance for abundance. His right to sell the product of his industry cannot, for one moment, be questioned. The value that he offers in the market, the

charge that he claims the right to make, is simply the payment, or the reward, he demands for his industry. He has made a sacrifice, has rendered a service, has conferred a benefit, and now he claims a product, a benefit, in return. And has not his industry given him an unimpeachable title to that reward?

In the same way the carpenter, the builder, and the clothier all rejoice in the abundance of their products, and they claim a share of the abundance only after they have contributed their quota of service to the production of that abundance.

But when we investigate the claim of the land speculator or collector of ground rent to reward, then we find a marked contrast. His claim is exactly opposite in character to that of the farmer, the builder, and the clothier. He rejoices in scarcity, for as scarcity of land increases, as population becomes more and more congested, as people are compelled more and more to economize space, so grows more and more his fortune. While busy industry seeks the factory, the farm, or the shop, that it may add to the abundance of its production, and while it brings forth wealth in lavish richness, the speculator adds not one iota to the world's wealth, but lays on industry a heavy hand, and compels it to surrender an extortionate tribute. The farmer uses land for production; the speculator uses land for extortion.

The Creator furnishes the raw material; industry comes with its magic touch, and converts that raw material into the finished article. Industry comes to the ore, to the soil, to the clay, thence spring the machinery, the food, the building. The contact of industry with the soil is one of beneficence, bringing forth sustenance for the maintenance of men. The contact of speculation with the soil is one of maleficence. Let industry have access to the original sources of wealth, and it enriches; let speculation come, and it impoverishes. The hand that begot the abundance goes away with scarcity, for it is despoiled; the hand that begets nothing goes away overflowing, empowered by law to despoil. God's law would reward each according to his work, man's law reverses this order. It curses ten-hours-a-day with a poor home, poor surroundings, poor education, and allows no-hours-a-day to "reap where it has not sown, and gather where it has not strawed."

Is this honest? If it is honest, then we must abandon all proper ideas of religion. "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

THE EVERLASTING TRIBUTE.

For centuries the command, "The land shall not be sold forever," has been regarded as a dead letter, hardly even worthy of investigation. We have treated the gift of God as though it were a product of toil. Under forms of law, we have taken the heritage of humanity, and given it to be the exclusive ownership of one portion of the people.

It is reported that the site of New York city was once sold for twenty-five dollars, and it is also reported that one piece of land in that city has since been sold at the rate of upwards of twenty million dollars per acre. The value of the site of that city has been estimated at \$2,000,000,000. When settlers came there first, they had to pay but little for the occupation of land, but with every increase of population, with every additional railroad line or steamship line centring in that city, the people have had to pay more; they have had to surrender more of the product of their industry. For centuries, the industry of the country has paid for the privilege of doing business on the land of New York. Year after year have the toilers paid this tribute, and in spite of this long-continued payment, their obligation is now greater than ever. It is the toil of Sisyphus. The task is no nearer completion than it was a century ago. Where at one time industry had to surrender a dollar, to-day it surrenders a thousand. Fifty years hence the obligation will be still greater. In the whole range of economic science, no fact is better established than this: Our present land laws inevitably force one part of society into everlasting indebtedness to another part of society. These laws subject them to never-ending tribute, to an obligation that is continually growing, to a debt so great, so increasing, that by no possible effort of industry, by no possible improvement in mechanical devices, co-operative agencies, or profit-sharing, can it ever be cancelled. It is a debt increasing, everlasting and irredeemable. The only escape from this endless tribute can come through a change in our laws.

SALE OF LAND VERSUS SALE OF GOODS.

One man raises food, another makes clothing. They exchange. They are mutually enriched, mutually benefited. No one is necessarily defrauded, no one necessarily injured, no one necessarily plunged in debt.

But, suppose I am the owner of a valuable town lot, from which I have been drawing rental simply for the land—a ground rent. I propose to sell it to my neighbor, Mr. Smith.

What do we exchange in this case? Is it land I am selling, or land plus something else? I am possessed of a power called a ground rent, to appropriate from some third parties their production, and I propose to transfer to Mr. Smith that power. For a certain consideration, I propose to transfer to him the power to subject third parties to an everlasting tribute. May not these third parties very properly question the justice of this transaction so far as they are concerned? The trade in goods bears all the marks of honesty and harmony, because it brings mutual benefit; the trade in land bears all the marks of injustice—an everlasting spoliation.

THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF THE MOSAIC LAWS.

Travelling through a wilderness, at the head of a band of escaped slaves, coming from a country in which despotism reached its highest pitch, in which superstition sunk to the most grovelling depths, Moses wrote the decalogue. All the philosophy of the ages fails to point out a flaw in the correctness of the principles therein proclaimed, or to detect a trace of superstitious idolatry in their statement. The bulk of their message relates to duty, and so imperatively do they command the acquiescence of the moral judgments, that we never think of questioning their correctness.

But no more remarkable than the decalogue is the economic system of Moses. Its *methods* may be impossible of application in this generation, but its *principles* are fundamental, applicable to all ages, and modern statesmanship will have to sit at the feet of an economic philosopher, who wrote ages before the author of the "Wealth of Nations," or of "Progress and Poverty." The system of Moses recognized clearly the distinction between the gifts of the Creator, the original endowment given for the equal enjoyment of everyone in every generation, and the products of industry produced by each for his exclusive possession, to consume, bestow, or sell, as his best judgment dictated. By that system, to each one was secured free access to the original source of wealth, so that no man was under the necessity of going with his hat in his hand looking for a job. There was thus secured to every man freedom to produce.

The land speculator tries to forestall the industrious man, not that he may furnish him a home, a crop, a quantity of clothing, but that he may extort, that he may get a lien on the products of industry, that he may obtain produce without producing. The Mosaic economy prevented this so far, at any rate, as the rural districts were concerned. It thus secured to every man the freedom to enjoy the product of his industry, free from the

exactions of a non-producing class of landlords and land speculators.

If there is one thing that the state should under no consideration interfere with, unless under the most extraordinary exigencies, it is the exercise by the individual of his common sense. When a man seeks oil, coal, food, clothing, surely he has a right to say where he shall obtain these as his best judgment dictates, and laws imposed to drive people from fertility, that make it a crime to resort to abundance, should never find a place on the statute-book of a nation. And this condition the Mosaic economy strictly observed. No line of pickets surrounded Palestine to prevent the Jew going to Egypt for corn, or to Phœnicia for cedar.

According to the teachings of Manver, Main and Lavelleye, there prevailed throughout the world a system of village communities in which the land belonged to the community, and each person in this community enjoyed an equal right to the land. It has been asserted that this was the system prevailing at the time of Moses, and that, therefore, we are not to attach so much importance to the Mosaic economy as being in any way unique, or that much is to be learned from it for our guidance.

The investigations of Coulanges, published in a book entitled "Origin of Property in Land," throws doubt on the correctness of the theory of village communities. Coulanges maintains that the so-called communal system was not a system of free communities, with ownership of land, but a system of manors, with a baronial landlord and his servile tenants.

To the Mosaic system we are indebted for a picture perhaps unparalleled in history for its purely democratic character, its absence of those vicious extremes only too manifest in other countries, an aristocracy revelling in excessive, unmerited wealth at one end, and its natural complement, a mass of degraded toilers, steeped in unmerited poverty at the other end—the baron and the villain, the millionaire and the tramp.

Plato drew on his imagination for his "Republic," in which he still deemed slavery an essential factor. More saw his "Utopia" only in his "mind's eye." To Moses alone is reserved the honor of founding a nation on laws that stand unparalleled in the history of the world for their complete recognition of the rights of the citizen, and the principles of justice. Where else can we find the clear recognition of the right of every child of God to the gift of God—the land? Where else the distinction between the gifts of God, the natural wealth, and the products of labor, the labor-produced wealth? Where else

do we see the proper limitation imposed that prevented the sale of that which was given by the Creator for division and not for sale? What other nation has ever enjoyed laws that secured to the citizen his right to produce, his right to exchange that produce whenever his best judgment dictated, and his right to enjoy the produce of his industry, free from the exactions of landlords and land speculators?

Some day we will also discover that no one generation has any right to plunge another generation into debt, that our great national debts are great national blunders, if not crimes. The year of Jubilee placed a limit beyond which indebtedness could not extend. The parent could not leave to his child a legacy of burdensome obligations. In that country could not be witnessed as we can in this country, the monstrosity of one child born under a crushing debt to another child.

There are evil symptoms everywhere that call on us to give our best energies to the investigation of these problems. When some men acquire so many millions that they can buy up legislatures, dictate policies, organize private police, reduce popular government to a sham; when millions of men see that honest toil brings but a pittance; when the best energies of the manhood of the majority must be devoted simply to satisfying the animal wants; when strikes, boycotts, lock-outs, black-lists are daily occurrences; when a mere handful of men control all the fuel output of a continent, to preach to men the brotherhood of man becomes the saddest of burlesques.

"The Gospel will cure all this," say a host of respondents. Yes, my brother, the Gospel will do it, when we learn correctly how to interpret and how to apply the Gospel. But to rattle over some platitudes, and to use the Gospel as a charm, will never do it; never, till the end of doom. The gospel of happy feeling and other worldliness has had its day. We now want the gospel of justice, "to every man his due." We are still "tithing the anise and cummin," and neglecting the weightier matters of the law, devoting a world of energy to mere details of organization, and scarcely a modicum of energy to studying the ethics of society.

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